178 Similar worship may take place at a spring (isumi). Near
196 Gushichan village there is a large spring. Stone stairs have been built up, amphitheatre-like, around it. Prayers are offered by villagers, or substantial numbers of them, on New Year and on the 5th day of the 5th lunar month. In daily life, the spring is a favorite place for laundering and bathing.

176 There are three well gods in Hinatogawa, and they are worshipped
178 at the three public wells scattered throughout the village. The people
196 of the village, or large numbers of them, assemble at these wells for prayer at various times of the year, the most important being on New Year and on boat racing day. Sake and a box of candy are placed before the well as offerings of thanks for water.

This village has also a place for the worship of the sea god. This is a simple stone on a small shelf, on a barren spot of the seashore, scarcely distinguishable from the rocks scattered in natural disarray by the waves. In a high wind, the remains of the offerings and the charcoal sticks are swept out to sea. The most important observance here occurs on the 4th day of the 5th month, the day of the sea festival and the boat races. Fishermen come to the place by boat and make offerings of sharks' fins. On this day, the whole village assembles twice to pray at the spot, once before, and once after the races and the celebration. Individual or family worship is common on New Year and at O-Bon. On the equinoctial holiday of the full moon, the headman, the heads of the neighborhood groups, the council and retired elder men assemble, offer thanks and pray for continued plenty from the sea. Very close to the palace of the sea god, a short round stick of bamboo or of thick miscanthus may be stuck in a pile of rocks. Near the top, a dried fish (usually the ika) tail is placed in a slit. In the center there is a slit for another but larger part of the dried fish.

176 The palace of the mountain god, though its identity is uncertain,
178 is near the palace of the sea god. It is under an overhanging rock
178 along the seashore. This seems an unusual place for the home of a mountain god, but seafarers may have prayed to the god in thanks for guiding them safely in. It seems now to have fallen into disuse. It is now partially overgrown with pandanus and little is known of the place.

176 Matsuda. In Matsuda, there are beliefs in well, mountain top, and
178 tree grove spirits. There are 8 wells here and family groups usually
182 divide up and worship at one of the wells. After drinking some of the water, thanks are offered to the well god.

176 The gods of the mountain top and the tree groves are difficult to
128 understand. Little seems to be known about them locally, and it is difficult to disengage historical from religious elements.

[176] One popular explanation is that these gods were the intentional
289 invention of Saion, the 18th century statesman and authority on forestry
178 and agriculture. But this seems highly unlikely. It is more likely that Saion capitalized on the ancient interdict against cutting down

1: Glacken E-5 (1951-1952) 1953 AC7 Okinawa AC7

trees of the sacred grove and used old beliefs to preserve the forests. Formerly it was believed that misfortune would come to him who cut a tree in groves sacred to these gods. If the trees were cut, the god would become angry, the person cutting the tree would be the victim of self-induced illness and by worrying about his deed, gradually would become ill, and perhaps die. These sacred groves, whose religious significance is now almost ignored, are arranged to enclose the village from three directions, with the open side on the south. On the north was the sacred grove in the back (ushiro no utaki) or the grove of the white gold mountain (kinpuku utaki in Okinawan). The mountain gods were supposed to live here. On the west was the grove in front (mae no utaki) on the white silver mountain. This was also known as the fire shrine.

The priestesses also had a hand in this worship of the mountain gods. There are about seven of these places of worship now, and there is still a voluntary caretaker, an old woman with tattooed hands, a family priestess (nigami) in the old system. Occasionally one sees an old woman going to a grove to pray. The only other visitors are the farmers who walk along the paths of the grove on their way to the fields.

7

Other Religious Observances

There are a few other observations which may have some interest. Old women use patches of grass or knotted rice straw to ward off the spirits on days when they are thought to be abroad in great numbers. At the festival of the autumnal equinox, knotted or braided grass (shiba) is placed in various parts of the house. In some houses, bunches are suspended from the cross beams, perhaps three or four bunches to the side. They may be placed in the toilet, at the entrance to the house compound, on the water barrel in the kitchen, on the front and back of fishing boats, or in the interior of the house. Blades of miscanthus grass may be tied around the neck of a bean paste jug (misogami). Spirits, plentiful at this time, are frightened away by the patches of grass and will not enter. The young, while not believing in this, acquiesce to avoid making the old angry.

When a death anniversary is being celebrated, there may be a blade of miscanthus, a rice straw, or a knotted blade of grass on the top of a box of candies or sweet meats to prevent the intrusion of evil spirits. A blade of grass (the san) is occasionally tied around the handle of a tea pot. For the first week after a family death, tea is served from a pot which has this blade of grass. But these are almost invariably the observances of the old and are only infrequently seen. These customs, observed in Hinatogawa, are said to survive among the very old in the other villages.

In Matsuda, a rice rope (shimenawa) was observed at one home. The rice rope, a Shinto symbol, is not common in Okinawan culture. This

Chapter 8

Religion

771 The religious beliefs of people in Taira and their ritual practices rec-
177 ognize the existence of two different sources of supernatural forces.
[776] The old Okinawan religion, which is still practiced by many persons
in the village, centers on beliefs in a host of nonhuman spirits that
[769] inhabit certain localities. A historically more recent Confuscian-
Bhuddist influence from China and Japan has added to these beliefs
the veneration of ancestors who, in their divine state after death, con-
[782] trol many activities of the living. Under the influence of these two
forces, the animistic and the ancestral, life must be conducted in such
[784] a way that both remain appeased at all times by proper worship and
performance of ritual as well as by avoidance of actions which might
offend these supernatural forces.

771 Even though many younger people laugh away the adherence to
[154] beliefs, especially in animistic deities, there is much evidence that the
life of almost all people is controlled by fears, anxieties, and desires
for appeasement stemming from these religious beliefs. Although his-
torically the animistic and ancestral religious beliefs were separate,
they are synchronized at present so that it is not always possible to
make a clear distinction between each system (Lebra: 1958).

776 The supernatural beings of nature live all around the village. There
are mountain deities, deities of the sea, of the well, of trees, and other
places. Any localities connected with productive activities, such as the
store, the sugar mill, the sugar press, and the village truck, have their
[372] own deities. There is also the Deity of Fire, associated with the hearth
and the house. He is represented in three hearth stones found in most
simple kitchens. Three upright small stones, resembling the hearth
stones, are the divine symbols in the village shrine where all these
supernatural beings are worshipped.

[?2] The supernatural beings living in and around the village appear

2:Maretzki & Maretzki E-5 (1954-1955) 1963 AC7 Okinawa AC7
Taira

women chant. The tempo becomes more and more frenzied, and at a certain moment a bell rings. Nobody knows who rings it, and no amount of questioning elicited any information other than that this was done by divine action.

Ancestral worship is equally important in the life of Taira people. Each house of an oldest son has a shelf with a shrine in the main living room. On this shelf the family keeps the ancestral tablets, each representing a deceased ancestor of a recent period. The tablets for whole family lines are kept on the shelves of the main houses. Through this system a family maintains continuity between the living and the dead. Although a deceased person is believed to become a buddha or a god who ascends to heaven, his presence is still felt by the living relatives. If they fail to make the required offerings on the first and fifteenth day of each lunar month, or otherwise neglect religious duties toward the ancestor, misfortune may come to the family. At the same time, the worship of common ancestors holds branches of the larger kin groups together.

No village adult died during our stay, but the funeral practices for adults described by Glacken (1955) and Pitts et al. (1955) for other villages in Okinawa are similar. Seven years is the age limit for a child burial, which is simple and does not require attendance of people other than immediate relatives and perhaps one or two neighbors.* During the study an 8-year-old boy died from an illness and was given a full funeral, which is similar to that of adults.

The funeral must take place at the first outgoing tide after the body has been prepared and dressed. Accompanied by family, residents of the ward, and mourners from other parts of the village whose number depends on the prominence of the dead, the body is carried on a simple, open litter to the tomb area just west of the central village (see map 2). Women feel free to show their emotions, while men remain outwardly calm. Until decomposition takes place, the body remains in a tomb used by the whole village for temporary entombment. Like other village ceremonies, funerals are less elaborate now than they once were, perhaps to the relief of all concerned, since death is highly anxiety provoking, and nobody feels comfortable during the prayers and the ritual farewell to the corpse at the tomb. The participants receive a cup of sake before leaving the tomb area to cleanse them of the pollution of death. Some people still prefer to return to the village by a different route so that the spirit of the dead person will be fooled and unable to follow.

* The reason for this is possibly that the younger child has not yet fulfilled his filial obligations.

2:Maretzki & Maretzki E-5 (1954-1955) 1963 AC7 Okinawa AC7
Taira

765 After death, memorial services are held in the home of the deceased
769 every seventh day until the 49th day when a more elaborate ceremony
782 concludes this period, and a permanent tablet is installed on the house shrine. On this day, too, offerings to the deceased change from white rice to red-colored rice, indicating the end of the mourning period. From now on, observances in memory of the dead are held on the first, third, seventh, thirteenth, twenty-fifth, and thirty-third anniversary of death. These are small family affairs at which special food is prepared and offered at the shrine before it is consumed.

765 The body is left in the tomb for at least three years until a propitious day when the whole village decides to wash the bones of all those who have died within the preceding three to seven years. On Bone Washing Day little groups of family members gather around the coffin. They take out the bones, clean them, wrap them in a white cloth and place
[778] them in an urn. Women do all the cleaning of bones because it is be-
[152] lieved that they have more power to expel the evil. They weep freely,
[852] and even some men find it hard to restrain their emotions. Young children are kept away from the tomb area at this time. The urns are then placed inside the family tomb, which has been opened for this purpose. Remains other than bones are burned with the coffin.

769 Every lunar March ancestral services take place at the tombs, at-
782 tended by many members of the kin groups to whom each tomb belongs. Some come from the city or other villages for this occasion, including women who have married into another kin group. This celebration of the dead is more serious than other religious events. Offerings of sake and special delicacies are made and then eaten by the family group. One family, sitting in picnic style around the tomb after their prayers, even began to sing and dance—probably to the delight of the ancestors who in their life must have enjoyed many a good feast and dance. Tombs of other relatives may also be visited for short prayers and other offerings.

775 Spirits of the dead are harmful only if the deceased is not from the
784 village. For this reason new residents formerly could not bury their
766 dead near the village. Even now, recent settlers in the central village have no tombs and keep their dead in urns in a cave, and the residents
[764] of outlying houses or field houses have a separate tomb area altogether. If a stranger happens to die in the village, measures are taken to prevent his spirit from doing harm. The body of a fisherman from southern Okinawa was brought to shore after a storm. There it was left for several hours on the beach under a tent in the hot sun until relatives arrived in a hired car to take the body home. Even then peo-

21Maretzki & Maretzki E-5 (1954-1955) 1963 AC7 Okinawa AC7
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ple did not carry it through the streets but along the shore to a spot nearby where the car could pull up.

Communication with ancestral or family spirits lies in the hands of individual households or the larger kin group. In general, as with the nature deities, women maintain the relationship. The oldest woman in the house prays and makes offerings in front of the divine shelf or by the tombs. Sometimes the high priestess, whose only regular role in the cult of ancestors centers around the mythical founder of the village to whom vague references are made, is asked to conduct a special prayer for a family at its ancestral shrine. Such invitations are usually the result of consultation with another religious practitioner to whom one turns in case of misfortune.*

Those who are considering a special undertaking, such as building a new house or moving to another one, or transporting ancestral tablets from one home shrine to another, seek the advice of a diviner, the *sanjinsō* or *yekisha*. This expert, always a man, consults books on the workings of the universe, special astrological calendars from which he can predict events by using a horoscope calculated on the birth date of the person seeking advice.

Although it would seem from the attendance at ceremonies that older people, mostly women, are the supporters of religion, even the most modern of the Tairans seem to share beliefs in the power of the supernatural forces and are loath to make an open break with traditions. One may verbalize that the old religion is just "superstition," but when it comes to dealing with adverse events, when somebody suggests that perhaps the *yuta* should be consulted, or a special offering is in order, or when the old special wine of the gods is prepared from rice for Boat Race Day, then many of the apparent apostates cooperate. To some extent this is done to appease the older people, but fear of neglecting duties, especially toward ancestors, is probably much stronger in general than people's behavior would suggest. Religious influence, then, which controlled so many facets of village life in former days, still acts as a strong force in uniting the members of families and descent groups as well as in binding together the community as a unit separate from other communities.

* See Chapter 9 for description of the *yuta* or shaman.

Today the *yukajiru* ceremony held on the fourth day ends the seclusion. A group of close relatives gather to ask for the good health of the child and to make food offerings to the ancestors.

On the fourth or fifth day a name is selected for the newborn. In the old days rice oracles presided over by an old woman were consulted to ensure that the name consist of the proper combination of Japanese writing characters, an essential for the well-being of the child's personality. Today family elders and the local teacher are consulted. In the pre-Japanese periods, temporary names were used until a permanent name was given. This practice was intended to fool the spirits during the early years when the child was thought to be particularly susceptible to spirits.*

On the sixth day after birth the mother is allowed to take her first postdelivery bath; the room which she has occupied with her baby is cleaned and aired, and preparations begin for the *mansang* celebrations. For this event the mother's parents try to be present, especially if it is a first child. Friends and relatives in the village attend. A female elder of the patrilineal kin group or the priestess prays behind a tray of rice, rice wine, and incense so that the child will sleep peacefully and not cry at night. Thanksgiving prayers are offered to the ancestors and the nature deities for the health of both mother and child.

When the prayers are completed, a man sings the *mansang* song to the accompaniment of a samisen. The father of the baby then rises to dance briefly, sits down, and writes with brush and ink on a white sheet of paper the name and birth date of his child. The paper is then hung on the wall near the alcove. Meanwhile the special song is being concluded:

> Coming from the darkness to light,
> This baby was received as a treasure
> And the mother is being celebrated.

Food is then served, and the guests discuss the name and admire the newborn. Like all parties, the celebration ends with song, dance, and wine drinking.

The *mansang* celebrations mark the end of the most critical period for the infant. From now on he may be taken outdoors. At the month's end, his parents may take him to see his maternal grandparents in their village, to offer food at the ancestral shrine of the mother. This is called the first walk. Sons who have left the paternal village for the city return with their infant to observe this day.

* Hanging an irregularly left-woven rope in the delivery room to keep out evil spirits which might harm the newborn, is no longer done in Taira.

cause misfortune; the ability to do this, he says, is hereditary from mother to daughter. My informants did not identify ichijama with the mabui or any other such entity, but merely explained it as a kind of 'noroi', "curse". Its effect is a sharp pain inside the body or the feeling that a fingernail has been thrust into the eye. If the person responsible is known, they said, the affliction may be cured by spitting in his direction and throwing pig dung in his direction, shouting, "I smear it on your face!" According to Yanagida, a yuta can cure an afflicted person by squeezing his thumb, which causes the thumb of the person responsible to be crushed. 754 [756]

Illness may also be caused by gods or local spirits as punishment for the breaking of tabus. For example, at Yamazato in Chinen-son it was said that on the 1st, 8th, 18th, and 28th of every month the "mountain god" (yama nu kami) makes a circuit of inspection of the mountain behind the village and therefore one cannot go to cut trees or grass on those days for fear of punishment. 753 784

But probably the most frequent interpretation of illness and misfortune is that it is caused by ugwambusuku, an insufficiency of worship (from ugwang, "worship" and fusuku, "insufficiency"). As has been explained, the dead can influence the lives of the living for good or bad. If the ancestors of a family are well cared for, that is, receive the proper offerings and worship, they may help that family to prosper and multiply, but on the other hand, if the ancestors are not cared for they will let the family know of their needs by some light illness, or, if their needs are still ignored, by some greater misfortune. They may not deliberately mean to harm their descendants; the misfortune may be automatic; this point is not clear. At any rate, the fear of ugwambusuku appears to be a very common anxiety and to play a central role in the whole structure of ancestor worship. Various religious practitioners and diviners, but particularly the yuta, are frequently called upon to try to determine where the insufficiency lies, what deceased person has not received his full share of worship and is therefore causing the current illness or other misfortune. To account for such illnesses and misfortunes the yuta and others may have revelations (shirashi) which revise the family's genealogy and even reveal the existence of hitherto unknown ancestors. 753 769 775 [152] [756] [787]

The insufficiency is not always of worship of the ancestors, although this is probably the most frequent type. Illness may also be caused by an insufficiency of worship of the Fire God. It is said that if an illegitimate child or the child of a secondary wife does not worship at least once at the Fire God of his shiji ("line") that is, the Fire God of his father's family, he may become ill. Thus it is not uncommon for the mother of an illegitimate child to bring it to the house of its father and ask to let it pray once to the Fire God there. This practice may also, of course, serve to demonstrate paternity. 753 782 [848] [851]

Also probably related to the concept that the ancestors influence the living is the practice of establishing a fictitious adoptive relationship between a child and an unrelated family. If a child is weakly its mother may ask an unrelated adult to become the yashinee-uya, "adopted parent", 769 753